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DEC 19 2005

LISTING OF CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A Voice-over-Internet Protocol (VoIP) system, comprising:

a network including at least two VoIP proxy servers configured to shift workload automatically and to allow voice data to be transmitted and received over the network; and

at least one VoIP client operatively coupled to the network to transmit and receive voice data over the network; wherein;

one of the at least two VoIP proxy servers is a primary VoIP proxy server configured to shift workload automatically to another of the at least two VoIP proxy servers by forwarding a request to connect received from the VoIP client to a next one of the at least two VoIP proxy servers in accordance with a predefined sequence;

the at least two VoIP proxy servers configured to continue to forward the client request to connect to the next one of the at least two VoIP proxy servers in the predefined sequence until the client request is received by one of the at least two VoIP proxy servers in the predefined sequence whose workload is below a predefined threshold;

the one of the at least two VoIP proxy servers whose workload is below the predefined threshold configured to respond to the forwarded request to connect with an identity which is forwarded to the primary VoIP proxy server;

the primary VoIP proxy server configured to provide the identity to the at least one VoIP client; and

the VoIP client configured to connect to the identified VoIP proxy server in order to transmit and receive voice data.

2-7. (Canceled)

8. (Currently amended) The VoIP system according to claim [[5]] 1, wherein when a last one of the at least two VoIP proxy servers in the predefined sequence has a workload above the predefined threshold, the last one of the at least two VoIP proxy servers responds to the forwarded request to connect with a message to the primary VoIP proxy server that all VoIP proxy servers are above the predefined threshold and therefore are unable to handle the call; and wherein the primary VoIP proxy server responds to the client request to connect with a message indicating all the VoIP proxy servers are busy and are unable to handle a call at this time.

9. (Currently amended) The VoIP system according to claim 1, wherein the network is ~~composed of~~ one or more networks selected from a proprietary network, a network of leased facilities, the Internet, an Intranet, a wide-area network (WAN), a local-area network (LAN), or a virtual private network (VPN).

10. (Currently amended) The VoIP system according to claim 1, ~~further including~~ wherein the at least one VoIP client is coupled to a gateway that is coupled to the network, wherein the gateway controls access to the network.

11. (Currently amended) The VoIP system according to claim 9, wherein the gateway ~~comprises~~ is one or more of a VoIP gateway, a VoIP PTSN gateway, a media gateway, or a router and an H.323 gateway.

12. (Currently amended) The VoIP system according to claim 1, wherein the at least one VoIP client ~~comprises~~ is one or more of an IP phone, a plain old telephone system (POTS) phone, a cell phone, a satellite phone, a microphone, a computer video camera with a microphone ~~and~~, or a multi-media computer configured to transmit and receive voice data.

13-19. (Canceled)

20. (New) A method of balancing workload in a Voice-over-internet Protocol (VoIP) system that has at least one VoIP client and plural VoIP proxy servers, one of the VoIP servers being a primary VoIP proxy server for the VoIP client, comprising:

a) receiving a call connection request from the VoIP client with the primary VoIP proxy server;

b) the primary VoIP proxy server determining if the primary VoIP proxy server has a workload exceeding a predetermined threshold for the primary VoIP proxy server and, if not, the primary VoIP proxy server connecting with the client to complete the call, else:

i) forwarding the call connection request to a next one of the VoIP proxy servers from a predetermined hierarchy of the VoIP proxy servers;

ii) the VoIP proxy server that received the forwarded call connection request determining if the VoIP proxy server has a workload exceeding a predetermined threshold for the VoIP proxy server and, if not, responding to the forwarded request so that the primary VoIP provides the identity of the VoIP proxy server to the client and the VoIP client connects to the identified VoIP proxy server in order to transmit and receive voice data, else repeating b(i) and b(ii).

21. (New) The method according to claim 20, wherein when a last one of the VoIP proxy servers in the predetermined hierarchy has a workload above a predetermined threshold for the VoIP proxy server, the last VoIP proxy servers responding to the primary VoIP proxy server with an indication that all VoIP proxy servers have a workload exceeding the respective predetermined thresholds for the VoIP proxy servers, and the primary VoIP proxy server responding to the VoIP client call connection request with a message that the VoIP system is busy.